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ECONOMIC REGIONALIZATION OF THE USSR

A. D. Danilov

The study of socialist location of production is based on thorough research on economic geographic regions of the country. The study of these regions is carried on along the following lines:

1. The influence and role of the region in the national economy of the country or in the larger administrative territorial complex.
2. Analysis and economic evaluation of the natural conditions and resources of a region, the possibility of their utilization of mobilization for the achievement of important goals assigned to the region by the state plan, and the many-sided development of the economy of the region.
3. Characteristics and peculiarities of the productive forces.
4. Study of the internal discrepancies between individual parts of the region, and establishment of internal and external economic and technological interrelations between branches of the economy, by enterprises and individual parts of the region.
5. Determination of the basic lines of the region's future economic development.

The prospects for further economic development of the Turkmen SSR, Kara-Kalpak ASSR, Western Kazakhstan, and the southeastern oblasts of European RSFSR hinge directly on the successful completion of the great construction projects and Stalin's plan for the transformation of nature which call for the creation of abundant supplies of electric power and raw materials for industry and population, and the solution of important transport problems.

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Each republic, kray, or oblast, by fully developing its own economy, assumes a specialized part in the over-all plan for the country's development, inasmuch as it performs some important economic task. In the system of economic division of labor among USSR republics and oblasts, for example, Uzbekistan is called on to provide the country with cotton; Azerbaydzhan, petroleum; Donbass and Kuzbass, coal and metals; Urals, metals and machinery; western regions of the RSFSR, flax; the North, timber, etc.

The most important scientific problem in the economic and geographic study of a region involves correct understanding and evaluation of its specialization and its designated role in the development of the national economy. Without such examination, it is impossible to give an accurate scientific description of its economic and geographic characteristics or to determine the pattern of its future economic development.

A full account of natural conditions and resources from the standpoint of their utilization and transformation is also essential.

Economic geography must be closely allied to physical geography and other physical sciences in order to utilize the results of their findings more fully in its own conclusions on harnessing natural resources to promote economic development. Foreknowledge of natural conditions helps to determine the influence of geographic environment on the economic development and future possibilities of a region. It also affords a better understanding of specific features of regional economy which are caused by peculiar natural conditions.

Extensive geographic explorations continue to reveal additional new sources and types of raw material, power, soil, climate, vegetation, etc. For example, a small spindle tree (*Euonymus*), which until recently had no economic value whatsoever, has suddenly attained significance as a source of raw material in the production of guttapercha. At present, Soviet botanists and foresters are directing their efforts toward locating new areas of supply of guttapercha and increasing its yield and cultivation. It is common knowledge that Khabinsk apatite-nephelite ore has for a long time been utilized only as a source of phosphoric acid (apatites); however, at present it is also very important as a raw material in the production of aluminite (nephelite). Recent studies by climatologists and soil scientists have confirmed the possibility of cultivating tea in Transcarpathia and other areas. There are other numerous examples. Soviet geologists each year discover new deposits and types of mineral resources in various regions of the country.

An analysis of the existing internal economic and technical relationships and the promotion of additional and even more effective relationships between industries and regions is of primary importance.

Internal economic relationships integrate and unify regional economy. Industrial cooperation, the right type of specialization, and the complex development of a region are conducive to complete and efficient utilization of its natural and labor resources.

While the internal relationships of a region under study reveal the extent of the unity and integration of its economy, its external relationships indicate its significance to the national economy and its place in the system of economic division of labor between regions. An analysis of external economic relationships, on the one hand, helps to uncover extremely long and irrational shipments of raw materials and finished products, the elimination of which would prove very profitable to the country in view of the great distances involved. On the other hand, in certain instances, it may reveal the possibility of developing new industries in that region.

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The pattern of future development of a region is determined by its place in the national economy as well as by an analysis of its natural and economic resources.

The outline for the long-range development of a region must be worked out along two basic lines:

1. An economic and geographic basis must be presented for its complex development.
2. On the basis of a thorough and detailed analysis of its economic and geographic features, it must contain proposals for fuller utilization of natural resources, transformation of nature, coordination of economic relationships, specialization, etc.

Soviet economic geographers are required to carry out economic and geographic exploration of large territories, principal economic regions, republics, krais, and oblasts, as well as of smaller territorial units including even individual administrative regions, cities, and other settlements. Their primary task is a thorough and detailed description of the economic and geographic features of the region, as part of the material necessary for planning various current and future projects concerning its economic development. Requests of this nature are constantly received from economic and planning organizations entrusted with planning the great construction works in the Volga region, Caspian area, Turkmenia, Crimea, North Caucasus, South Ukraine, and Central Chernozem regions. Such regional descriptions must also be supplemented by factual scientific material as well as maps, cartographs, and statistical data.

The concept of economic regions is widely applied in the USSR. Regional divisions and their composition are closely linked to the practical needs of the national economy and to the problem of proper distribution of economic resources. There are regions of various designations such as cotton, flax, grain, coal, ferrous and nonferrous metals, fuel, timber regions, etc.

In addition there are "synthetic" economic regions representing territorial complex production areas with highly developed internal economic and technical relationships. While following a single long-range plan for its development, these regions are engaged in economic activities vital to the national economy. For purposes of distinction they are called complex economic regions and are known among economic geographers as the economic regions of the Gosplan. Regions of this nature can have a relatively small area. Each republic, kray, and oblast represents a complex economic region. Complex economic regions can also exist within republics, krais, and oblasts and within basic economic regions themselves. The creation of complex economic regions can also be dictated by practical needs since Soviet economic regionalization is closely tied in with national economic planning. Such planning is conducted both on the branch level by ministries and departments, and on the territorial level by regions. Consequently, an economic region is the nucleus of national territorial planning.

The territorial composition of economic regions of the country is subject to change in accordance with the stages of economic development and general national objectives. The scheme adopted by Gosplan USSR for the RSFSR contains nine basic economic regions: North, Northwest, Central European, Volga, North Caucasus and Crimea, Urals, Western Siberia, Eastern Siberia, and the Far East. The size of the area, the composition and the size of the population, the level of economic development, and the natural conditions of these regions are extremely varied. It is not difficult to imagine the difference between the Central European and the Far East regions, or between the North Caucasus and the North, etc. It is the diversity rather than the homogeneity of natural conditions that characterizes the basic economic regions of the country.

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The chief economic factors considered in the formation of basic economic regions are as follows: single plan of regional development, over-all national economic objectives, and internal economic relationships existing within the region between industries, branches of the economy, and specialized territories.

The significance of over-all national objectives as deciding factors in the formation of regions is quite obvious, inasmuch as the principal lines of regional specialization are determined by them. Territorial limits and size are determined primarily by the requirements to create all the necessary prerequisites that will insure successful fulfillment of the tasks assigned to that region. Internal economic relationships integrate the region into a complex productive and territorial unit.

Basic economic regions have not emerged as a result of natural factors, but have developed according to plan. In each region, geological exploration was carried on to find new sources of raw materials and power; new enterprises, industries, and transport routes were created; and internal and external economic relationships have been established.

The principal feature of a basic economic region is its complex economic development. In the over-all planning of production, a limited approach involving only the distribution of individual branches and enterprises is inadequate, but should include scientific planning of over-all complex economic development of all sections of the country.

In conformance with the state plan for the complex development of the country, metallurgical bases in the Northwest, Transcaucasus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Khabarovsk Kray have been successfully set up; large new machine-building plants in the Volga Region, Transcaucasus, Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Western Siberia, etc., have been added to existing enterprises; and Azerbaydzhan, Georgia, and the nonblack-earth belts of Eastern Siberia and the Far East have been made more self-sufficient.

Economic development often presents new economic problems and leads to changes in the distribution of productive forces, thereby causing certain changes in economic regionalization. For example, it was regular practice to include Murmansk Oblast in the Northwestern Region. Leningrad industrial center was the main base for the raw materials, fuel, and maritime products from that oblast. All economic communications were conducted chiefly over the single Murmansk-Leningrad rail line connecting the oblast with other regions. On the other hand, the ice-free port of Murmansk was of considerable importance to the Leningrad industrial center. Since then, the situation has changed substantially. The country now possesses ice-free ports in the Baltic, and Murmansk Oblast has been completely revitalized. At present, it is the scene of such varied activities as the processing of raw materials, large-scale shipping, and fishing, and it has a new rail outlet which permits it to get fuel from newly created fuel regions in the North. Without severing its connection with Leningrad, the oblast has greatly expanded its communications with the North. Territorial similarities between Murmansk Oblast and regions of the North, as well as the common objectives in the national economic plan which strengthen existing economic relationships, raise the possibility of including Murmansk Oblast in the Northern Region.

The gigantic hydroelectric power stations under construction on the Volga, which will transmit power to the Central European Region, and the construction of the Volga-Don Canal are expected to change the make-up and economic relationships of several oblasts and large economic regions.

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A complete study of changing conditions with the aim of perfecting economic regionalization and relationships poses an important scientific problem for economic geographers.

Economic regionalization is one of the mediums of state planning which promotes manifold economic development of republics, krays, and oblasts. Complete regionalization of the country speeds up industrialization of backward regions, krays, and republics, creates new industrial centers, and insures a more efficient distribution of industry and agriculture throughout the country.

The division of the country into basic economic regions does not in itself end the problem of regionalization. The territorial phase of national economic planning is also carried out by republics, krays, and oblasts which have been assigned important economic tasks. The existence of sound economic relationships, and the complex and diversified economic development in republics, krays, and oblasts puts them in the category of complex economic regions.

Soviet administrative and territorial division aims at strengthening the country's economic and political power. During the first years of the Soviet administration, in the division of the country into krays and republics the emphasis was placed on the establishment of sizable political centers as essential bases for the consolidation of power in the area. For example, it is commonly known that the yataa-veluga region was attached to Nizhgorod Kray by Gosplan because at the time the region lacked any large political centers.

In view of the successful solution of political problems and the consolidation of power in the population, the regionalization of krays and oblasts is assuming greater significance.

Along with the consolidation of the Soviet state came the gradual subdivision of the country into smaller administrative and territorial units. The subdivision was conducted along union republic, kray, oblast, rayon, and other administrative and territorial organization lines. Between 1934 and 1951, the number of krays and oblasts increased from 70 to 136; and city and rural rayons from 2,559 to 4,866. Oblast divisions were introduced among several union republics, among them the Kazakh, Belorussian, Uzbek, and others; while in the Central, Northwest, Siberia, and Far East regions of the RSFSR, oblasts were divided into smaller units.

Usually, the size of the oblast territory is directly connected with the size and distribution of population and the extent of industrial concentration. The presence of large cities and high density of rural and urban population results in smaller areas. The smallest and yet the most densely populated oblasts are Moscow, Kiev, Khar'kov, and Sverdlovsk. On the other hand, Arkhangel'sk, Tyumen, Tomsk, and other oblasts are extensive in area but sparse in population and industrial centers.

Economic geography has been called upon to study economic conditions of krays and oblasts in order to provide scientific assistance to the government in its administrative and territorial division of the country.

Economic regionalization is not in conflict with political and ethnological division of the country; rather, it strengthens the independence of socialistic nations.

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